

VZCZCXRO1054
OO RUEHGA RUEHHA RUEHQU RUEHVC
DE RUEHOT #0536/01 1082132
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 172132Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7710
INFO RUCNCAN/ALL CANADIAN POSTS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 000536

SIPDIS

NOFORN
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/17/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [AF](#) [CA](#)
SUBJECT: DESPITE CONTROVERSY, USEFUL FM VISIT TO AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. OTTAWA 373

[1](#)B. PARIS 720

Classified By: PolMinCouns Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary. Apart from unfortunate remarks to the media by FM Bernier suggesting replacement of Kandahar's governor -- which Bernier quickly retracted -- his visit to Afghanistan along with his French counterpart was useful, with a special focus on policing and health. Canada's next steps in Kandahar are to seek more integrated civil-military planning and civilian control over at least one provincial reconstruction team, issues that Deputy Minister Mulroney may raise in Washington on April 25. A new Cabinet Committee and a separate House of Commons committee on Afghanistan should bring heightened coordination and more focused attention on Canada's involvement in Afghanistan in the wake of the March 13 Parliamentary vote to extend the mandate of the Canadian Forces until 2011 (ref a). End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Domestic attention to Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier's April 12-15 visit to Afghanistan along with French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner (ref b) focused primarily on Bernier's comments on April 14 to reporters in Kandahar indicating that it might be time to change the Kandahar governor, due to long-standing concerns over corruption. Although Bernier was quick to issue a clarification (full text in para 8) insisting that Canada respected Afghanistan's sovereignty and was not calling for specific personnel shifts, the opposition and media highlighted this diplomatic gaffe, among calls for his resignation. Prime Minister Stephen Harper, in and out of Parliament, admitted that Bernier had "misspoken" but reiterated the official line about full respect for Afghan sovereignty, and said he considered the matter closed.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) According to Director General Kerry Buck of the Afghanistan Task Force at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canadian diplomats had had to work hard on "damage control" with President Karzai (but not with the governor himself) after Bernier's statement, which she insisted was not what he had intended to say (at least publicly). She admitted that Canadian diplomats in Afghanistan had been concerned for some time about the governor's performance, but had no actual evidence of any wrongdoing. She confirmed that Bernier had not raised the issue of the governor in his talks with President Karzai, Foreign Minister Spanta, or other senior officials with whom he met bilaterally or together with FM Kouchner in Kabul.

[1](#)4. (C/NF) Overall, Buck rated Bernier's visit as "very good," with a particular focus on policing and health issues (the latter largely due to Kouchner's background, she added). In Kabul, Bernier underscored Canada's support for the Afghan electoral process and its happiness with the decision

to go forward with the 2009 Presidential elections, while pressing the Afghans to establish a genuinely independent election commission, which Karzai promised to do (although the Canadians have their doubts, Buck said). Bernier highlighted the importance of respect for human rights. He pledged Canada's continued support for the G-8 border initiative, while urging Karzai to try to "re-energize" discussions with Pakistan on the border. He reiterated Canada's support for the June 12 Paris conference on Afghanistan; Buck indicated that the Canadians left with the impression that the Afghan goals for the meeting were not yet entirely clear.

15. (C/NF) Buck explained that Bernier's movements in Kandahar were limited due to security concerns, apart from a visit to a hospital and an inspection of French Mirage aircraft. She noted that Canada was particularly proud of its training center for police and corrections officials. A top priority now will be on more integrated civil-military planning; the Canadian Forces and the 28 officials of the Canadian International Development Agency in Kandahar still worked largely independently, even when they were engaged in similar projects in the same district. The full-time presence of Canadian diplomat Elissa Goldberg in Kandahar has already added a civilian face to coordination meetings and should quicken this transition, she predicted. Buck noted that Canada would like to pursue civilian control over at least one provincial reconstruction team and would likely seek our advice on this issue as well as on civil-military relations at the April 25 meeting in Washington between Deputy Minister David Mulroney and SCA A/S Boucher. Mulroney would also welcome more information about the plans for U.S. troop deployments in Kandahar, their relations with Canadian Forces, and the prospects for the next commander of RC-S, according to Buck, who will separately chair the RC-S

OTTAWA 00000536 002 OF 002

Officials' Meeting in Ottawa April 27-28.

16. (C/NF) Minister of International Trade David Emerson is off to a good start as an energetic chairman of the new Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan, Buck explained, with weekly meetings already contributing to greater inter-agency coordination. The Committee was particularly focused on the search for a "signature project" in Kandahar, as the March 13 Parliamentary motion had mandated, following a recommendation from the independent advisory panel headed by former Liberal Deputy Prime Minister John Manley. She underscored that any such major project would by definition necessitate close civil-military cooperation, if only to provide force protection.

17. (C) Separately, Liberal Party Foreign Affairs Critic (equivalent to shadow Foreign Minister) Bob Rae confirmed to PolMinCouns on April 16 that the Commons had formed a special committee on Afghanistan, which will begin its work after the Parliamentary recess April 21-27. Conservative MP Pierre Lemieux will act as chair, with Rae as one of the Liberal members. He indicated that a particular focus, at least from the Liberal perspective, will be to monitor Canada's and NATO's efforts at nation-building and reconstruction, rather than military developments. He added that committee members would like soon to travel to Afghanistan (which he visited twice already before winning re-election in a March by-election), and also eventually to meet with U.S. officials and members of Congress in Washington. PolMinCouns offered to facilitate meetings in Washington once the committee pinned down its desired dates.

18. (U) Text of FM Bernier's April 14, 2008 statement:
quote
Afghanistan is a sovereign state that makes its own decisions about government appointments. I can assure you that Canada fully respects this and is not calling for any changes to the Afghan government. In fact, our primary goal is promoting

the self-sufficiency of Afghanistan in all aspects of nationhood, including development, security and governance. We will continue working closely with all levels of the Afghan government to advance this objective.
End quote

Visit Canada,s Economy and Environment Forum at
http://www.intelink.gov/communities/state/can_ada

BREESE